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ABSTRACT

A successful content area reading program not only includes reading classes that teach specific skills, but also provides for the inservice training of teachers, offering activities that facilitate student reading comprehension in the content areas. For such a program to succeed, the financial commitment and time devoted to teacher training must be substantial and large numbers of teachers at all grade levels must be involved. It is likewise essential to form a committee responsible for planning the inservice training program. The responsibilities of this committee would include the following: identification of objectives, goals, and content scope for each grade level; definition of content material according to student needs and related skills; development of materials; establishment of schedules for reading specialists within the content area classroom; and arrangement of inservice sessions. The reading specialist, with expertise in reading in the content area, would administer the program, provide direct assistance and individual instruction for the content area teacher, and analyze materials according to concept, difficult vocabulary, and familiarity for the student. (Two reading activities are described.) (HAI)

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AN IDEAL SECONDARY CONTENT AREA READING PROGRAM

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Content area reading is the process by which teachers acknowledge differences in students' reading ability and subsequently structure the use of content area reading materials to facilitate students' comprehension and the development of their reading skills. Throughout the years two general techniques have been used to facilitate students' understanding of content area texts. One technique is to provide reading teachers with materials which exemplify those typically used in various content area classes. It is assumed that if specific reading skills are taught within the context of materials typically encountered in content area instruction that these skills will more readily transfer to students' everyday reading tasks than if these skills are taught in isolation. Another technique, which is advocated by many reading authorities (Karlin, 1969; McKee, 1948; Spache & Spache, 1969; Herber, 1970), is to provide content area teachers with the training which will allow them to master specific types of teaching methods which will facilitate the reading process without directly teaching specific reading skills. It is the view of these reading authorities that while students should be taught specific reading skills in their reading classes, they should also be provided with reading tasks in their content area classes which will allow them to comprehend the content of the reading.

Both of these techniques have merit. Reading skills should be integrated into content which is meaningful and representative of daily reading tasks encountered in school. And every student should be provided with successful reading experiences in every content area class. Thus, it is my belief that a successful content area reading program includes

reading classes which teach specific skills in meaningful content and the in-servicing of content area teachers on methods of facilitating students' comprehension of content area texts.

This presentation is concerned with a discussion of those components of an ideal content area reading program which provide classroom teachers with methods to facilitate students' understanding of their texts. Specifically, I would like to briefly suggest those sorts of things content area teachers can do to facilitate reading and then discuss in some detail the steps involved in creating, administrating, and maintaining a content area reading program.

Numerous texts have been written to provide secondary teachers with specific teaching methods which will aid students' understanding of texts (Burmeister, 1974; Thomas & Robinson, 1976; Herber, 1972; Piercy, 1976). In general, these methods texts suggest a variety of techniques which are practical and useful for various students and subject matters. An understanding of the techniques discussed in these texts provides teachers with the tools to structure daily reading tasks in such a manner that each student, regardless of his or her reading ability, will attain some level of understanding of the material read. These techniques include pre-reading activities, reading activities, and post-reading activities. I would like to provide an example of a specific type of post-reading activity and a specific pre-reading activity to demonstrate the sorts of things content area teachers may do to facilitate students' reading. The post-reading activity I would like to discuss is the provision of differentiated questions for students with various reading abilities.

This technique recognizes that students are capable of answering different types of comprehension questions. Various comprehension taxonomies list a scope and sequence of comprehension skills. These taxonomies range from Barrett's (1970) somewhat elaborate classification to the more general classification scheme proposed by Herber (1972). The differentiated question technique first acquaints students with a taxonomy by defining its skills and providing examples of questions which exemplify those skills. Next students are given an opportunity to answer questions which are labeled according to the skills they exemplify. Once students are acquainted with the taxonomy, classroom questions are labeled according to the skill which they require and students are assigned questions which require skills they can deal with. Such a procedure not only recognizes the various reading abilities within a class, but it also provides students with questions they can answer. Another example of the sort of activity content area teachers can use is a pre-reading activity designed to teach students the new vocabulary contained in a reading selection. The teacher identifies up to ten words in a reading selection which he/she feels will be unfamiliar to many of the students. The teacher writes these words on the board and defines them for the students, who copy the words and record their meanings. The teacher then reads the first few paragraphs of the selection, stops, and requests students to continue the story by having them write what they think will follow in the text. Students are instructed that they must use at least half of the new vocabulary in their writing and that in five minutes they will pass their papers to another student, who will continue writing that

story. This procedure not only provides students with the opportunity of using new vocabulary words in meaningful contexts, but also allows them to read the words in contexts structured by other students.

Most teachers readily accept the idea of using techniques such as these in their content classes. While there are a variety of techniques for facilitating reading, most of which are thoroughly discussed in the texts I previously mentioned, it seems to me that the problem with content area reading programs is the lack of understanding as to how these techniques can best be acquired by content area teachers. The comments which follow, therefore, are concerned with the organization of an in-service program for content area teachers.

My beliefs are based on several tenets. First, it is absurd to think that teachers will acquire the knowledge to facilitate reading by attending two or three in-service sessions during the school year. The financial commitment and the duration of the teacher training program must be substantial if the goals of a content area reading program are to be realized. Second, if a content area reading program is to succeed, it must involve large numbers of teachers at all grade levels. Consequently, both secondary and elementary teachers should be involved in the program. Third, a content area reading program will be more successful if the goals and objectives for each content area at each grade level have been specified. Teachers must know what it is they are trying to teach before they can facilitate the acquisition of that knowledge from texts. All too often the content of a particular class is determined solely by the teacher who does not identify this content for teachers in the successive grades.

Consequently, students often have gaps in their knowledge of a content area and this hinders their comprehension of texts. Unfortunately these tenets are not realized by many content area reading program planners until the content area reading program has been in existence for some period of time. This necessitates substantial changes in the program, changes that could be avoided by dealing with the tenets prior to beginning the program. Recognition of the three tenets leads to a definition of the programs breadth of coverage, its objectives and its duration.

The next consideration of in-service programs is its content. The content of the program needs to be determined by an assessment of staff and student needs. Like any educational innovation, a content area reading program evolves from the recognition, articulation and determination of need in light of expressed needs and assessed competencies. Teachers and administrators must recognize the need for a content area reading program, and be willing to commit their time and resources for its success. The ideal content area reading program conducts a comprehensive assessment of the perceived and actual needs of teachers. Frequently, content area reading programs fail to evolve in accordance with the desires and expectations of teachers because teachers were not included in the planning of the program. The ideal content area reading program develops from a needs assessment administered to teachers to identify their competencies with methods which facilitate reading, and to identify their perceived needs. Eventually, these identified needs become the goals and objectives of the teacher in-service program. To assess teachers' competencies in the use of questioning strategies, for example, the assessment would define

such techniques as the use of pre-questions, interspersed questions and post-questions and then request teachers to indicate if they make use of those types of questions. Teachers' perceived needs for additional training in the use of questioning strategies would be assessed by again defining the techniques of questioning, providing examples of their use and then requesting teachers to indicate the degree of their interest in acquiring additional knowledge of those techniques. An accounting of perceived and actual needs provides program planners with preliminary goals for staff development.

These goals should also be compatible with student needs as determined by reading test scores, achievement test scores, attitudinal surveys, and teacher-made tests which assess students' ability to read content area materials. Together, the needs of the teachers and students determine the feasibility of a content area reading program.

Once needs are assessed it is necessary to create a committee responsible for planning the in-servicing of teachers. Ideally, this committee consists of content area reading specialists, departmental chairs, district content area specialists, and reading coordinators. The responsibilities of this committee should include the following;

1. Identification of the objectives for each content area at each grade level, with the goal of defining a scope and sequence of instruction. The development of district wide content area curriculums is certainly not unique to the development of a content area reading program. Many states have required the definition of goals and objectives under various accountability laws. Yet

many students have difficulty understanding content area reading materials because the material has not been developed in an organized and comprehensive manner.

2. Define content of material currently being used in the various content areas in light of the curriculum's scope and sequence of skills and the needs of the students. Particular attention should be given to the identification of materials containing identical skills, but written at different readability levels.

3. Development of materials when existing texts fail to present the scope and sequence of instruction in a manner which is appropriate for a wide range of student abilities. The writing of curriculum can be funded by placing a one year moratorium on the purchase of texts. These monies can be used for staff writing teams during the summer months or after school. The development of these materials would not only consider the scope and sequence of the content area curriculum, but also the techniques of the structured readings previously discussed.

4. Scheduling of content area reading specialists within the content area classroom. The ideal content area reading program recognizes that in-service is an on-going process which includes the training of teachers within their classrooms by the content area reading specialist.

5. Planning of in-service sessions. Training should be provided for the entire staff according to the needs determined by the needs assessment. Sessions should be conducted by district reading specialists and outside consultants who are aware of the needs of the teachers and address themselves to those needs. Many school districts are not prepared for in-servicing teachers, and the outside consultants can add valuable assistance. Additionally, these sessions should include content area reading specialists and classroom teachers who demonstrate classroom techniques.

The content of these sessions varies from one school to another according to the needs and competencies revealed in the needs assessment. In general, however, these sessions should include such topics as readability of texts, teaching of vocabulary, questioning strategies, use of teacher-made reading tests, study skills, and reading rates.

Up to this point, I have focused on the assessment of needs and planning for teacher in-service by organizing the curriculum in each content area. Once these goals have been met, the responsibilities for program administration are assumed by the content area reading specialist. The qualifications of this specialist should not only include an expertise in reading, but also an expertise in reading in the content areas. Presently, few institutions of higher education offer coursework for the preparation of content area reading specialists. I suggest professional organizations such as the International Reading Association consider

drafting guidelines for state certification of content area reading specialists. The requirements for this certification would include certification in reading, certification in at least two content areas, course work in curriculum design and administration, course work in content area reading methods, a content area reading practicum, and a course in general learning systems. Although there is a growing trend toward the use of secondary reading teachers as content area reading specialists, few of these individuals have specific training for these positions. An ideal content area reading program depends on content area reading specialists who are well trained.

The role of the content area reading specialist is to provide direct assistance and instruction for content area teachers. Specifically, it is the duty of the content area reading specialist to provide teachers with "hands on" activities which will facilitate the students' understanding of content area reading materials. This is accomplished by a combination of general in-service training sessions and individual in-servicing of content teachers. Ideally, the individual in-service allows the specialist to work with the teacher directly in the content area classroom. The specialist makes use of the needs assessment to structure an individual training program which will address the teachers' expressed needs and assessed competencies.

One useful approach to this individual in-servicing is team-teaching. Lessons are planned jointly by the classroom teacher and the content area reading specialists. In this planning session, the specialist clearly defines reading objectives which are perceived as being helpful to the

students' understanding of the reading selection under consideration. For example, a social studies teacher finds that a particular chapter he is using is very difficult. The teacher and the reading specialist analyze the material, taking into account its comceptual load, difficult vocabulary and familiarity to students. Having examined the reading material the teacher defines his/her objectives for the reading selection. The reading specialist and teacher then plan a variety of activities to facilitate student understanding of the reading material. The lesson is then taught by the specialist. When the lesson has been completed, the teacher and the specialist evaluate the success of the lesson in general, and the effectiveness of the various techniques in particular. The first joint endeavor of the content area reading specialist and the content teacher must produce successful outcomes if the specialist is to gain credibility. After this initial encounter, the specialist and the teacher can plan lessons which are more imaginative in nature.

It is difficult to predict how much time is necessary for in-servicing individual teachers. In part, it depends upon the needs of the teacher and the time which the reading specialist can provide. Generally three or four chunks of time during the year have been shown to be useful. This amount of time gives the teacher time to try out various techniques suggested by the specialist, and it gives the teacher more time to consider additional needs. During the course of the year, then, the content area reading specialist conducts an informal assessment of teachers' needs and competencies. As the needs of teachers change, the program adjusts or redefines its goals with the assistance of the teaching staff and the school administration.

As mentioned previously, in-servicing of teachers is time consuming. The amount of time allowable for the maintenance of the content area reading program from one year to another rests upon the assessment of teacher needs and the needs of the students. Generally, if the program meets some of the needs of the teachers, there will be a desire on behalf of the staff to continue the program. Most teachers see a content area reading in-service as an on-going process which assists them in changes in curricula, changes in students' abilities, and changes in teaching staff.

This presentation has provided a general description of the ideal content area reading program. Its focus has been on what I consider to be the least defined aspects of facilitating reading within the content area classroom. Many of the components of the program which I have discussed are often unattainable due to constraints of personnel and finances. Yet if this notion of having teachers directly attend to the teaching of their content in a manner which allows all students to comprehend texts, we must consider the complexities involved in a content area teacher training program. If we fail to consider these complexities, many content area reading programs will be doomed to failure, and the notion of teaching reading in the content areas will be regarded as unrealistic.

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